

# OBITUARY

EVELYN FULLER

BY the tragic death of Mrs. Evelyn Fuller the British birth-control movement has lost one of its most skilled and devoted workers. Evelyn Fuller was born in 1894, at Gillingham in Kent. She was the youngest child of an Admiralty official and of a former teacher in a Church of England school. It was a "long" family, and through the most impressionable period of her life Evelyn Fuller had the conviction that she was an unwanted child. Whether this belief was well-founded or not, it certainly was a factor in determining her passionate interest in the birth-control movement. She had trained as a school teacher and held various posts in the profession, but in 1922 gave up this career to join the newly-formed Walworth Women's Welfare Centre. If her work in this organization and in the Society for the Provision of Birth Control Clinics is not better known it is only because Evelyn Fuller shunned publicity and preferred to get on with the job. She was a woman of shrewd and independent judgment, unclouded by sentiment and uninfluenced by catchwords and slogans. Her long experience gave her a first-hand knowledge of the domestic problems of working-class mothers. She understood the case for eugenics better than most, and rejected only what she regarded as its "snobbish" features. It is due largely to workers like Evelyn Fuller that the eugenics and birth-control movements have in recent years found so much ground for common activity.

Dr. C. P. Blacker writes: The birth-control movement has attracted many types of supporters. The denominator common to them all has been a sympathy with the predicament of poor women who are compelled by ignorance to bear unwanted children. In one type of person, this sympathy may express itself in propagandist activities such as public speaking, moving resolutions at conferences, attending committees and writ-

ing articles in the press. In another type, it expresses itself in a desire for practical work wherein direct contact is made with the women who most need help. Both forms of activity are clearly necessary for the success of the movement.

Mrs. Fuller was an extreme example of the second type. She hated propaganda, conferences, committees and publicity; but at the Walworth and East London Clinics, of which she was the Secretary, she was an indefatigable, loyal and highly efficient worker. These characteristics, while discouraging co-operation with other birth-control organizations, caused her to be immensely respected not only by the people serving on the committees of her clinics, but also, and more important, by the women whom she served. Few people outside the birth-control movement know Mrs. Fuller's name; but those within the movement recognized in her one of the few really essential people.

I recall an incident at the Seventh International Birth-Control Conference held at Zürich in 1930 at which we were both present. The conference was attended by numerous German delegates. The birth-control movement in Germany was then less mature than here, and it had not entered on what could be called the statistical and self-critical stage. Torrents of impassioned oratory were let loose on us. We were subjected to exhortations, adjurations and harangues which bludgeoned our faculties. In the middle of one of these tempestuous sessions, Mrs. Fuller was called upon to speak. She hurriedly mounted the platform and, obviously disliking the task, read a report upon 25,000 women who had attended the Walworth and affiliated centres. Her delivery was rapid and her voice sounded flat, barely reaching to the back of the room. Her paper passed almost unnoticed against the thunderous denunciations and asseverations of the German delegates. Yet it ranked with Dr. Hannah Stone's as the most informative of the Conference, and it was clear to those who listened that it had involved many hours of preparatory work. I

also recall the occasion when a photograph was taken of the members of the Conference. I saw Mrs. Fuller standing behind the photographer, refusing to join the group. I protested at her aloofness, asserting that she was the most important person present ; but nothing would induce her to move.

Those who knew Mrs. Fuller recognized in her a person of the most single-hearted devotion, in whom was combined a deep and genuine philanthropy, an intense energy and a complete lack of egotism. Her work for birth control has been immense ; indeed, she ranks as one of the leading figures which the movement has produced in the two decades after the war. Yet she cared nothing for recognition, credit or reward. She will never be forgotten by those who worked with her.

Mrs. Janet Chance writes: Evelyn Fuller was one who turned her own experience of difficult times and bitter facts into a determination to alleviate life for others ; and who, whenever fortune was kind, at once found others with whom to share everything she had to give.

She was vigorous, intense and persistent in her activity, wearing herself out in a ceaseless drive to accomplish the growing work to which she gave her life ; and with and through this keen personal attention, she developed and maintained a high standard of efficiency and result. On the lay side, it was she who made the Walworth Clinic and stamped it with the human touch, so that at many a meeting of working women one had only to say to the hesitant, " you will find a welcome at Walworth," to have an endorsement from another who had already discovered that " you could not ask better than you get at Walworth."

Like many marked personalities, Evelyn worked best on her own ; she was impatient of conferences, committees and suggestions that threatened her supreme aim, to " get on with the job " ; and get on with it she did, with a zeal and an attention to detail and danger that were known and valued the more the longer one had experience of her results. She cared, at times almost ruthlessly, for the oppressed, and she worked, reckless of her own strength, for the right of

men and women to decide for themselves that great question whether or not to bring into this world another human life.

In the end, she took her own.

A hundred times she had already debated and determined for herself an attitude to that act. She frequently discussed such a possible end—its ethics, its practicability and its pros and cons, for her own relief, for the handicap to the work she valued, and for the blow it would be to her friends ; and without hesitation she considered, should the conditions dictate it, that for her it might be a wise, courageous and sensible end.

At the cremation in the City of London Cemetery on April 25th, her friend, Mr. Sim, gave her for us all the farewell she would have liked ; he read the words, marked and quoted by Evelyn herself :

" Ah Love! could you and I with Fate  
conspire  
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things  
entire,  
Would we not shatter it to bits—and  
then  
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's  
Desire! "

And one saw round her ashes, in spirit, honouring her life and her death, giving her an assurance of a living memory of love and gratitude, thousands of women who, at Walworth and Mile End and in places where her name itself may not be known, find through her work a new hope and the defeat of fear.

Lord Gerald Wellesley writes : In the death of Mrs. Evelyn Fuller the birth-control movement has sustained an irreparable loss. For fifteen years she worked at the Walworth Women's Welfare Centre which was founded to enable fully qualified medical practitioners to give instruction in contraception to poor women.

Only those who have worked with her can appreciate Evelyn Fuller's extraordinary business capacity. If information was asked she gave it in exactly the form in which it was required. She presented facts with perfect clarity and deduced the logical conclusion from them with irrefutable cogency. With

quiet efficiency she got through the work she had to do. Her *Manual on the Management of a Birth-Control Centre*, and her oral advice to those about to start one were models of their kind.

It is not surprising that a person whose mind was so essentially practical should have been a little intolerant towards those whose trend lay more in the direction of theory. Mrs. Fuller always thought that her job was to do the best she could for the poor mothers with whom she was brought into actual contact. She was impatient with committees who laid down rules for the conduct of the "man on the spot." She distrusted conclusions based on written statistics rather than on practical experience.

To those of us who worked with her for the Walworth Women's Welfare Centre her loss is indeed a terrible one. We relied entirely on her and we knew that we could believe anything she told us. It will be long before she is forgotten by her colleagues on the Committee and at the Walworth and Bethnal Green Centres.

#### JOHN CHRISTIAN PRINGLE

The Reverend John Christian Pringle, Director and Consulting Secretary of the Charity Organisation Society, died at his home on Monday, April 11th, at the age of 65. His death deprives social work in this country of one of its most brilliant exponents and philosophers.

Mr. Pringle was educated at Cargilfield, Winchester, and at Exeter College, Oxford, where he gained First Class Classical Mods. in 1893, and Second Class Classical Finals in

1895. From Oxford he entered the Indian Civil Service and became a judge in Sind. He left India to take up Holy Orders, and was ordained deacon in 1902 and priest in 1903. For three years he was curate at All Saints, Poplar, and afterwards at St. John-at-Hackney. He was then appointed head of the Missionary College at Hiroshima, Japan, where he remained for five years. Returning to this country, he was appointed to the curacy of St. Peter's, Eaton Square. In 1919 he became Rector of St. George's-in-the-East, and was appointed Examining Chaplain to the Bishop of Chester; he was also chaplain to the Royal College of St. Katherine from 1920-32. From 1914-19 Mr. Pringle acted as Secretary of the Charity Organisation Society, and in 1925 was appointed full-time Secretary—a post which he held until 1936, when, on account of ill health, he became Director and Consulting Secretary to the Society. He was the author of several books, his last work, *Social Work of the London Churches*, being published in December 1937.

John Christian Pringle was a member of the Council of the *Eugenics Society*; he took a great interest in its work and contributed a number of articles on eugenics.

A man of charming personality, Mr. Pringle was the accepted authority on family case-work and social legislation in this country. His counsel and advice were sought by social workers from every part of the world. His essential kindness, his humility, and his great fund of knowledge, made him, among those who knew him, widely loved.

B. E. ASTBURY.

